

TAKAKEL

November 23, 1957

Dear Otto:

We have just returned home, after our long journey via Perth, India and Italy, to find your note of November 15. Before coming to a reply, let me take the occasion to thank you again for your good offices in Canberra—needless to say, we derived great pleasure and profit from our trip in Australia, and we know it is no longer possible to insist that the Americans are the most hospitable people.

I am frankly sorry that Bob (Dr. Wright) elected the Melbourne position; I would certainly have leaned myself towards the opening in your organization. We did try to contact Wright in Paris, but he missed us by a few hours. He will have boarded the SS. Orion today at Naples according to his written itinerary.

I think that Syd had finally come to a similar conclusion, and can only suppose that Wright was motivated by some of the all too common Australian attitudes about Canberra. I hope you will not think too harshly of Syd, despite the embarrassment and trouble that you have had to waste on the matter. The approaches which he (and I) made to you were justified by the advantages to your own group much more than by any pleading on Wright's account. I do understand, however, that you may have found yourself in an awkward position, which I hope you can put down to the difficulty of communication in the first instance.

May I, however, make a further suggestion? Quite possibly, Wright's decision may have been ~~unduly~~ unduly influenced by the haste that was called for at the time. Since Melbourne, to whom, was a familiar place, and Canberra an unknown quantity (the living conditions in which must certainly have improved greatly during the past 5 years) his choice may have been the prudent one for the circumstances. If, however, you have now decided (and I may interject wisely, in my own opinion) to pursue the project of a microbial geneticist, perhaps there would now be time for a more sober reconsideration. I rather believe that if this were possible Wright would be better advised to look to Canberra.

If you can agree to this, and in light of Syd's own uncertainties, I would suggest that you might contact Syd with a view to notifying Wright (either immediately, or upon his arrival at Adelaide about Dec. 21) that the whole matter ought to be reviewed. I am rather sure that Syd would be agreeable to a change-of-mind, though he would of course be disappointed to lose him. I appreciate that some circumspection will be needed in any approach of this kind, so I will not upset the apple-cart, and will make no further comment on the subject either to Bob or to Syd.

Frankly, at the instant, I cannot suggest another candidate nearly so plausible as Wright would be, but I will certainly keep the issue in mind. I particularly hope the mixup will have no permanent bad effect, particularly as concerns MJDW—but I have no doubt in my own mind as to the wisdom of your original conclusions.

With best cordial regards,

Yours,

Joshua Lederberg